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C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 000485

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2017

TAGS: [GH](#) [GV](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: GHANA ON GUINEA: OSEI SAYS MUST FIND FACE-SAVING
WAY OUT FOR CONTE

Classified By: Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater for reasons 1.4 d and e
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¶1. (C) On February 22, Ambassador had a lengthy discussion with Secretary to the President Ambassador D.K. Osei about Guinea. Osei underscored the need to get trade unions into the negotiations to select a list of 3-4 potential candidates for prime minister that President Conte could accept. Sierra Leonean President Kabbah and Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had traveled to Guinea to negotiate with the trade union leadership, Osei said. If the choice of prime minister is good Conte could demit office in a face-saving way in what Osei called a "psuedo-legal transition." Osei hoped the new Prime Minister could appoint a Government of National Unity sufficiently independent of Conte to ensure he could not control elections. (Note: a new PM has since been named. End comment.)

¶2. (C) Osei depicted Conte as "a crazy man" who had stashed away lots of money which he was convinced he could use to buy the loyalty of the military. Ambassador queried Osei about the continuing influence of Aisha Conneh, the Guinean wife of LURD Chairman Sekou Conneh. Osei said she has a "big-time" influence on Conte, asserting that Conte trusts her completely and that political negotiators in Guinea must engage her, include her in the equation, and guarantee her security if there is to be a winning formula.

¶3. (C) Osei was clear that President Kufuor would have "no direct discussions" with Conte to get Conte to step down. (Note: Ambassador had ealier urged Kufuor's direct intervention. End note.) Kufuor would work through sub-regional organizations (especially ECOWAS). Burkina Faso's President Compaore wants to succeed as head of ECOWAS and could have a significant impact on Conte if he is actively engaged, according to Osei.

¶4. (C) Comment: Osei was unusually focused during this meeting on Guinea, ensuring no outside disturbances and not answering his numerous cell phones. He clearly was engaged and knowledgeable, insisting on the need to find a face-saving solution for Conte, whom he repeatedly characterized as "crazy." Kufuor's approach to Guinea is typical -- he prefers a low-key role, working through multilateral institutions. We can expect this will be the pattern of his engagement on Guinea and on other issues as AU Chair.
BRIDGEWATER